

Idaho Charter Schools Initiative Status Report 1998 - 2003

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I. Charter Schools: National Review

> Introduction:

Charter schools represent a dramatic new type of public education serving all types of students. Charter schools are far more autonomous and enjoy greater flexibility than other types of public schools. Many of the rules and regulations that govern public education are relaxed for charter schools in exchange for greater accountability regarding student achievement. Charter schools are approved by specified authorizing agencies (school boards, universities, state boards of education, etc.) and operate under conditions established in a legal contract (referred to as a charter). Idaho limits charter school authorization to local school boards. If a charter school does not achieve the established goals specified in the contract, the charter school can be closed. Charter schools are subject to ongoing evaluation and periodic reauthorization by authorizing agencies.

> Rationale for Charter Schools:

- Charter schools serve as research and development centers for public education;
- Provide competition within public education;
- Respond to parental demand for educational choice;
- Provide greater flexibility with rules, regulations, finances, and instruction;
- Provide emphasis on student performance and accountability;
- Add diverse programs to public education;
- Provide comprehensive site-based management and parental involvement;
- Provide research-based "learning communities";
- Use new approaches to serve diverse student populations, including at-risk and special needs students.

> Growth of Charter Schools:

- The first charter school legislation was passed in Minnesota in 1991; California followed in 1992 and six more states approved charters in 1993. In 1995, eighteen additional states passed charter laws. To date, 39 states and the District of Columbia have approved charter school legislation.
- For the 2001-2002 school year, nearly 680,000 students attended more than 2,700 charter schools.
- During the 2002-2003 school year, 450 new charter schools opened. The provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act (2003), which allow public school students in low-performing schools to transfer to other public schools of their choice are likely to send more students and their parents in search of charter schools.

- Several states have passed legislation that allows for entire school districts to become a charter and receive the benefits associated with charter schools. There are currently charter districts in Florida, Texas, California and New Mexico. A group of independent charter schools in Los Angeles is currently exploring the possibility of reorganizing themselves into a unified charter school district.
- Political support for charter schools is bi-partisan in the United States. The U.S. Congress and many state legislatures have supported charters as an alternative to vouchers, tax credits, home schooling, and as a way to stimulate experimentation and educational improvement.

> **Charter School Approval:**

- Twelve states limit charter school approval exclusively to local school boards.
- Twenty-seven states have granted charter approval authority to government agencies, community colleges, and universities. Indiana has granted authority to city mayors to approve charters. Michigan's charter school law has granted charter approval authority to the boards of local and intermediate school districts, community colleges, and state universities. Nine universities and one community college have authorized and oversee 151 out of the 181 charter schools in Michigan.
- Multiple charter school authorization appears to make a significant difference in the number of charter schools that are authorized:
 - 5.6% of the nation's charters are located in the 12 states which limit authorization to local school boards.
 - 57% of charters have been granted by authorities other than school boards.

> **Public Attitudes Toward Public Schools:**

There continue to be many who do not understand charter schools and others who have mixed attitudes about this new type of public school. These diverse perceptions are reflected in the 2002 34th Annual Phi-Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward Public Schools:

- While 55% of the respondents to the Gallup Poll reported that they had "heard or read about so-called charter schools" (up from 49% in 2000), 43% of those responding indicated that they had not heard or read about them.
- When asked if they favored charter schools, 44% responded that they favor charter schools, 43% that they opposed charters, and 13% responded that they did not know.
- When asked "would you favor charter schools in your community if funding them meant reducing the amount of funds for the regular public schools?" 30% responded that they "would favor" charter schools; 65% responded that they "would oppose" charters.
- When asked if they would favor or oppose charter schools that "offered all instruction online over the Internet;" again, 30% responded that they

"would favor" charter schools, 65% responded that they "would oppose" charter schools.

> **Federal Funding for Charter Schools:**

Both the Clinton and George W. Bush administrations have supported charter schools. Recent federal funding for charter schools has included:

- 2001: \$190 million
- 2002: \$200 million
- 2003: \$200 million requested; Senate Appropriation Bill \$200 million. The White House has also included a request for an additional \$100 million for charter schools.

The Idaho Department of Education has received two federal grants for charter schools totaling more than \$5.5 million during the past four years and has two additional years of funding remaining on their second grant. These funds provide assistance to Idaho charter schools for start-up and dissemination activities.

> **Summary of National Issues:**

- Facility funding continues to be a major barrier and challenge.
- Conflicts with local school boards continue to persist.
- Some charters lack external evaluation and assessment.
- Authorizing agencies in many states lack the necessary resources to provide adequate oversight, technical assistance, evaluation and assessment.
- Occasional problems of fiscal mismanagement have been reported. Some charters have closed because of fiscal problems; a few have closed for academic reasons.
- While some charter schools have closed or have been closed, no accurate accounting of these events is available. Some charters have been approved but never opened. Reports by The American Federation of Teachers and The Center for Education Reform offer conflicting conclusions regarding these numbers.

II. **Research on Charter Schools:**

> **Charter School Student Diversity:**

- The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) reviewed a number of studies regarding the demographics of charter schools and concluded "charter schools nationwide have student demographics similar to other public schools. Nearly 70% of charter schools had a student racial and ethnic composition similar to the surrounding schools; about 17% served a higher proportion of students of color and about 14% enrolled a lower percentage of students of color." (CPRE Briefs, April 2002)

- The Center for Education Reform (CER) has reported that charter schools attract diverse student bodies. The study found:
 - Nearly 60% of charters serve a student population with more than 40% students who qualify for free and reduced-priced meals.
 - More than half of all charters serve a student population with more than 40% minority students.
 - Nearly half of all charters serve a student population where more than 40% of the students are considered at-risk or who are former dropouts. (CER, 2002)
- Charter schools in Minnesota attract a significantly diverse population of students. In 2002, Minnesota charter schools enroll a higher percentage of low-income students, a higher percentage of students of color, and a higher percentage of students with disabilities than the average public school in the state. (Kappan, January, 2002, p. 350-355)

> **Charter School Impact on Public Education:**

- In 2001, the U.S. Dept. of Education released a study called *The Impact of Charter Schools on School Districts*. The research reported:
 - More than half of the public school districts in the United States created new educational programs in response to charter schools.
 - All-day or extended-day kindergartens were the most common response of school districts.
 - Nearly one-quarter of the school districts opened new schools designed for specific student needs.
 - Approximately 45% of the school districts reported becoming more “consumer-service” oriented after charters were established; 40% reported more communication with parents. (U.S. Dept. of Education, 2001)
- After reviewing a number of studies, the Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) reported that research findings were mixed regarding the impact of charters on public school systems. Several studies found little or no impact on public school districts in response to new competition. Other studies found evidence of school districts responding to charters in their areas. Findings of charter school influence on school districts included “increased marketing and public relations efforts, and new programs or ‘theme schools’ similar to those found in charters.” (CPRE, April 2002)

> **Effectiveness of Charter Schools:**

- **Consortium on Policy Research for Education (CPRE):** No definitive study of the effectiveness of charter schools has occurred to date. Part of this is due to the fact that so many charters are still relatively new, the wide variety of different types of charter schools, and charter research has often been conducted by groups that appear biased. After reviewing a number of studies, The Consortium on Policy Research in Education (CPRE) concluded: “no conclusive data

indicates that charter schools are failing their students, and some charters are showing positive achievement results.” (CPRE, April 2002)

- **Brookings Institute:** The Brookings Institute reported mixed findings regarding student achievement in charter schools. The report identified charter schools in four of ten states that were lagging behind their traditional public school counterparts on state test scores. The study concluded that this might be because charters are disproportionately serving students who have historically not done well in public education. (Brookings Institute, 2002)
- **Center for Education Reform (CER):** In a survey of more than 2,357 charter schools (481 schools responding), CER reported:
 - Forty-three percent of the responding charters offered additional instructional time (extended day, extended school year or both).
 - Responding charters utilized a wide range of curricular innovations.
 - Average per pupil cost was \$4,507 in the charters, compared to the national average of \$7,000 for public schools in the U.S.
 - Gains were reported in reading and math for the most academically challenged students.
 - Achievement test scores of responding schools were comparable or higher than related school district and state scores. (CER, April, 2002)

> **Parental Satisfaction:**

- Consortium for Policy Research In Education (CPRE): After reviewing a number of studies, The Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) concluded “parents generally give their charter school positive marks... and appear to be highly involved in their charter schools.” (CPRE, April 2002)

III. Status Report: Idaho Charter Schools

> **Growth of Idaho Charter Schools:**

- Idaho charter school legislation was approved in 1998 and authorized the establishment of no more than 60 charter schools in the first five years, with no more than 12 schools opened in any single year. This limitation or cap is due for legislative review in 2004.
- To date, seventeen charter schools have been approved in Idaho: 13 are in operation, three planning to open in the fall of 2003, and one has closed.
- Five charter proposals have been rejected by local school boards. Three of those that were rejected have appealed unsuccessfully to the State Board of Education.

- While Hispanic and Native American groups have explored charter schools, no charters have yet to be initiated by minority groups.
- There are currently more than 3,000 students enrolled in the 13 Idaho charters, with approximately 4,000 students currently on waiting lists. Some students, especially in the virtual schools, are only part-time students.
- Since 1998, Idaho charter school enrollment has grown an average of 25% annually; last year enrollment increased 38%.
- The J.A. and Kathryn Albertson Foundation provided \$100,000 grants to the state's first six charter schools to help defray start-up costs.

> **Idaho Charter Schools:**

• **Charter schools opened in 1998 – 1999 school year:**

- **Moscow Charter School**
Location: Moscow
Grades/Enrollment: K-6, 105 students
- **Lost River Charter School**
Location: Arco
Closed due to school district concerns over management and governance.

• **Charter schools opened in 1999-2000 school year:**

- **ANSER Charter School**
Location: Boise
Grades/Enrollment: K-6, 138 students
- **Coeur d'Alene Charter Academy**
Location: Coeur d' Alene
Grades/Enrollment: 6-12, 316 students
- **Nampa Charter School**
Location: Nampa
Grades/Enrollment: K-11, 335 students
- **Pocatello Community Charter School**
Location: Pocatello
Grades/Enrollment: K-8, 182 students
- **Renaissance Charter School**
Location: Moscow
Grades/Enrollment: K-12, 106 students
- **Meridian Charter High School**
Location: Meridian
Grades/Enrollment: 9-12, 176 students

• **Charter schools opened in 2000-2001 school year:**

- **Blackfoot Charter Community Learning Center**
Location: Blackfoot
Grades/Enrollment: K-5, 59 students

• **Charter schools opened in 2001-2002 school year:**

- **Hidden Springs Charter School**
Location: Hidden Springs
Grades/Enrollment: K-9, 311 students
- **Sandpoint Charter School**
Location: Sandpoint
Grades/Enrollment: 7-9, 90 students

• **Charter schools opened in 2002-2003 school year:**

- **Idaho Virtual Academy**
Location: Arco; Distance Education (Statewide)
Grades/Enrollment: K-5, 838+ students
- **Idaho Virtual High School**
Location: Mt. Home; Distance Education (Statewide)
Grades/Enrollment: 9-12, 132 students
- **Idaho Leadership Academy**
Location: Pingree
Grades/Enrollment: 9-12, 90 students, with an additional 50 students attending at satellite sites

• **Charter schools approved, planning to open in 2003-2004:**

- **North Star Charter School**
Location: Star
Grades/Enrollment: K-8, projected enrollment 270
- **White Pine Charter School**
Location: Idaho Falls
Grades/Enrollment: K-6, projected enrollment 157
- **Meridian Medical Arts Academy**
Location: Meridian
Grades 9-12; enrollment to be determined

[Note: Most of these schools are serving a student capacity specified by charter documents. To increase the number of students a charter serves requires amendment to the original charter.

> **Creative Approaches Emphasized in Idaho Charter Schools:**

- flexible salaries, schedules and staffing
- character education; focus on responsibility and respect
- Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound
- thematic instruction
- multiple intelligences
- individual education plans for all students
- student uniforms
- multi-age and multi-grade instruction
- project-based learning

- portfolio assessments
- developmental and continuum-based assessment
- career theme and technical emphasis
- on-line, interactive learning
- K-12 foreign language instruction
- algebra instruction in the elementary grades.

> **Effectiveness of Charter Schools: Idaho**

- In Idaho, charters are among the “highest-achieving schools in the state” and charter schools in the Treasure Valley show math and reading scores that compare favorably with or even exceed state and district averages. (Idaho Statesman, September 5, 2002)
- Idaho Charter Schools have distinguished themselves in reading education. Sixty-eight percent of charter school third-grade students scored above grade level on the Idaho Reading Indicator, compared to 55% statewide. At the kindergarten level, 77% of charter school students were reading above grade level, compared to 45% statewide. (Idaho Reading Indicator [IRI] 2002)
- Students in Hidden Springs Charter School rank nationally at the 96th percentile or better for every grade on the ITBS Core Test. One-hundred percent of kindergarten and first-grade students scored at level 3 on the 2002 Idaho Reading Indicator.
- A number of Idaho charter schools have received a variety of awards, citations and recognition. These include:
 - Exemplary Model of the States’ Learn & Serve Program, by Idaho Department of Education. (ANSER Charter)
 - Outstanding Artwork and Choir Performances, by state/local agencies. (Coeur d’Alene Charter)
 - Two students selected as part of a 24-member national student research team to participate in Dr. Robert Ballard’s Jason Project. (Coeur d’Alene Charter)
 - Wednesday Afternoon Enrichment Program, by Idaho State Journal. (Pocatello Community Charter)
 - Environment-Based Education, by Idaho Education and Environmental Round Table. (Pocatello Community Charter)
 - Collaborative Professional Development, by Expeditionary Learning Outward Bound. (Pocatello Community Charter)

> **External Evaluation of Idaho Charter Schools:**

- In year three of an annual five-year evaluation contract, The Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL) reported positive findings regarding Idaho’s charter schools:
 - Idaho charters are improving student learning. Most charters meet measurable student standards on standardized test scores.

- Eighty percent of staff and 90% of parents believe their respective charter schools either meet or exceed their missions. Some of the state’s charters have measured their accomplishments; others still do not provide adequate evidence to support their reported levels of accomplishments.
- Charters attract high-quality teaching staff. Eighty-nine percent have at least six years of experience; 34% have advanced degrees.
- Eight-five percent of the charters had student demographics that reflected those of their respective districts.
- Charter enrollment has increased 38% since last year. Charter schools have attracted many home-schooled and private-schooled students back to public education.
- The NWREL also identified the primary challenges faced by Idaho Charters:
 - Facilities
 - Student transportation, especially during the first year.
- The NWREL evaluation included the following recommendations:
 - Provide clear evidence: All charter schools should provide clear evidence of their accomplishments, which will result in a more accurate evaluation of Idaho charter schools.
 - Increase access to charter schools: Encourage marketing strategies that address diverse groups of students before a lottery is held, since it is difficult to increase diversity once waiting lists have been established. Provide transportation dollars to first-year charter schools since they do not have a previous year’s average daily attendance (ADA) figure by which to claim funds.
 - Increase the number of charter schools: Encourage rural schools going through consolidation to consider “going charter” in order to keep their educational communities intact. It may become necessary to allow for alternative chartering options, given the slow rate of growth of charter schools in Idaho.
 - Increase awareness that charter schools are *public* schools: Much of the general public is still unclear about what charter schools are (or can be), and many tend to think of them only as alternatives to “public school” or as “alternative schools” for at-risk students.
 - Encourage the evaluation process. Parent survey return rates are still low despite adjustments to the administration schedule and a few schools did not report data in several key profile areas, making it impossible to report comprehensively about the charter school program.

IV. Modification of Idaho Charter School Legislation Since 1998

> Changes made during the 1999 session:

- HB310a contained several changes:
 1. Changed the date for re-allocating unused charter school allotment from October 1 to June
 2. Exempts charter schools from sales tax
 3. Requires charter schools to be accredited
 4. Requires an accreditation report be given to the state board
 5. Requires charter schools to address how dual enrollment will be handled
 6. Clarifies computation of support units for charter schools
 7. Charter schools may become alternative schools if they meet all SBE rules
 8. Definition of “Educational Institution” expanded to include charter schools
- HB186: Allows a public charter school to enroll a student in a public school for dual enrollment purposes

> Changes made during the 2000 session:

- HB522: Clarifies that employees of a charter school must undergo a criminal-history check
- HB677: Allows the Board of Directors of a charter school to borrow money to finance the purchase of school facilities and to use the facility as collateral
- HB 726a: Clarifies that a charter school shall operate independently of any school board of trustees or the state board. It also clarifies that once the local district approves the charter, its only duties are to ensure that the terms of the charter are being met and that the law is not being violated

> Changes during the 2001 session:

- SB1060: Amends existing law to require public charter school to prepare and submit audit reports and to annually file financial and statistical reports with the State Department of Education
- SB 1070: Amends and adds to existing law to create a “School Facility Support Fund;” to provide for allocation of money to the fund, including lottery money, school support funds which remain following distributions
- SB1038: Amends existing law to provide that the State Board of Education shall review the effectiveness of charter schools and report to the legislature

- SB1132: Provides for an appeal if a charter school revision is turned down by a local school district
- HB278: Allows growing charter schools to receive a 25% advance payment in July. This corrects a cash flow problem for growing charter schools
- HB294: Amends existing law to provide that a new or conversion charter school shall specify an attendance area for admission preference
- HB315: Amends sections of the Idaho Code referring to school building safety and authorizes interest grants to be made
- HB329: Adds to existing law to provide an income tax credit for the purchase of classroom supplies for use in public school classes taught by a taxpayer who is a certified public school teacher

> Changes during the 2002 session:

- SB1383: Requires open meetings by charter schools
- HB543: Waives the “use it or lose it” requirement for administrator allocation and funding for charter schools
- HB546: Clarifies that even though most state rules are waived for charter schools, all general education laws apply unless specifically directed otherwise in chapter 52, title 33 of Idaho Code

V. Idaho Charter School Network (ICSN)

> Background:

The Boise State University Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies facilitated the development of a statewide “network” of charter schools (ICSN). The ICSN has been financially supported for the past two years through contributions from the BSU Center for School Improvement and Policy Studies, two \$10,000 matching grants from the Charter Friends National Network and annual dues of \$1,000 from individual Idaho charter schools (to meet the annual \$10,000 matching funds requirement). In addition, the Idaho Department of Education has provided funding for charter network conferences and staff development. In 2001, ICSN also secured a grant from the Colorado League of Charter Schools for \$66,000 (Walton Foundation) to join four other states in a three year project to develop and pilot a statewide accountability plan for charter schools.

> ICSN Mission and Role:

- Promoting a positive working relationship with local and state educational communities;
- Collecting, organizing, and disseminating information in support of public charter schools in Idaho and the nation;
- Supporting variety, advocating for, and providing mutual support for Idaho public charter school efforts; and

- providing and/or brokering technical assistance to the Idaho charter school efforts.

> ICSN Activities Have Provided:

- Information dissemination regarding grant opportunities, state and national charter school developments, and regulation interpretation.
- Information and technical advice to groups interested in starting new charter schools.
- Information sharing between Idaho charter schools.
- Consensus building for unified responses and recommendations to Idaho policymakers.
- Coordination of the development of proposals for external grants.
- Professional development for Idaho charter school educators.

> Future of ICSN

- Unfortunately, existing financial support to ICSN will soon end and no additional funding sources have been identified. As a result, the future of network coordination is uncertain.

VI. Idaho Charter Schools: Observations/Issues

- **Charter School Successes:** Idaho charter schools have been successful in attracting parental support, piloting and evaluating educational innovations and developing a track record of strong student achievement. The *Idaho Statesman* (9/5/02) reported that the reason for the charter schools' success seems to be because of: small classes, strong educational approaches, and parents who are highly involved and supportive of their children's education.
- **Limited Growth:** The development of charter schools has been much slower than anticipated when legislation was approved in 1998. The reasons for this slow pace of development are complicated, but may be due to:
 - The lack of information or understanding regarding charter schools (documented in the annual Gallop Poll of the public's attitudes toward public schools).
 - The opposition of some school administrators and some local school boards toward charter schools (reported in Idaho news stories during the past four years).
 - The Idaho legislation restricting charter school authorization to local school boards.
 - The absence of technical assistance available to help local groups of parents and educators who are interested in charter schools to negotiate the complex charter authorization process.
 - The difficulty in finding adequate funds to obtain facilities and support "start-up" activities. Some charter school teachers,

administrators and parents have used their homes as collateral to secure bank loans to obtain facilities for their school.

- **Authorization and Support:** While there are many benefits in having local school boards authorize charters, a number of continuing conflicts exist between local charters and their authorizing Boards of Education.
 - Some of these conflicts might be avoided by more carefully defining how local school boards monitor and supervise charter schools.
 - Other issues appear to be more complicated. Because of the technical/legal requirements in approving charter schools and the time and resources needed to supervise charter schools, a number of school board members have suggested that a single, statewide agency might be established to provide technical support, review proposals, authorize charters and provide on-going supervision.
 - There is also confusion regarding conflicting legal definitions of public schools and non-profit organizations, especially in regards to charter school board elections.
- **Revocation of Charter:** Some school board members are concerned that the only response available by law to conflicts with charter schools is the revocation of the charter at the time for reauthorization.
- **Reauthorization:** In the next two years, a number of charter schools are scheduled for reauthorization. Given the conflicts that have occurred between charter schools and local school boards, the reauthorization process could prove to be contentious and educationally disruptive.
- **Influence of Charter Schools:** There is some evidence that Idaho charter schools are influencing public education. This influence can be observed in developments in the Meridian school district where the local school board has established their first charter school, will open a second charter in the fall of 2003, and has long range plans for additional charters. In the fall of 2002, parents in the Boise school district voiced strong support for new public school options when they were surveyed regarding their interest in developing new "focus" schools. The Boise School Board has approved a new "open-enrollment" policy and is considering other initiatives in response to declining enrollments.
- **Issues regarding the developments of Charter Schools in Idaho:**
 - Multiple authorizing entities
 - Assistance in securing funding and/or loans for facilities
 - Increased financial support for initial start-up costs
 - Technical assistance to support the development and improvement of charter schools
 - Better and more widespread information regarding charter schools
 - Special assistance in minority communities for learning about and considering charter schools

- Support for the coordination of charter network activities
 - Preparation of teachers for charter schools
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More information about Idaho Charter Schools can be found at the Idaho Charter School Network's website at-

<http://csi.boisestate.edu/icsn>